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UNIFORM SYSTEMS OF CHILD LABOR STATISTICS

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Not long ago I heard a speaker say that one of the distinguishing features in the history of social progress in the twentieth century would be the place given to the consideration of the rights of children. Whether or not such prophecy will be fulfilled we cannot tell. But I feel that I am absolutely safe in saying that with respect to the conservation of the secular interests of our children, the history of the century will not record a single backward step. The intensity of the movement of which this Conference is but a manifestation, is a positive guarantee that in our country the exploitation of child labor is doomed. The trend is irresistible and the future is full of promise. The emancipation of the child will be accomplished.

However, as we follow the account given of the conflict between the representatives of this social movement and those who represent the employers of children, we realize that the battle is not yet won. When we come to examine the statutes of our several states we find that the subject of child labor has been sadly neglected in many of them. This fact is a stain upon our civilization and is sufficient justification for the existence of the National Child Labor Committee. The treasure expended in the maintenance of intensive work along this line will in the future bring incalculable returns. The enactment of laws to restrict and to regulate the employment of children, and the creation of state agencies to enforce such laws, are two of the principal objects undertaken by Child Labor Committees. And when that is done, there arises the necessity of observing the enforcement of those laws, their effect upon the problem; the need of amendment and improvement in order to meet new conditions must be carefully considered—in short, every step must be taken deliberately and with a set purpose. In order that every dollar expended and every ounce of energy applied be made to yield a maximum return, I conceive it to be the duty of all who in any way have to do with the campaign so to arrange their work as to

dovetail with the effort of others, so that there shall be no waste. I would apply this obligation to every agency, official and unofficial.

Two-thirds of the states have provided for some degree or method of factory inspection, and one of the chief duties of a factory inspector is the enforcement of child labor laws in the manufacturing establishments within his jurisdiction. The proper exercise of this governmental function is important, in the first place, to the men, women and children whose immediate employment is affected thereby. So far as the individual interest of each such employee is concerned, it is immaterial, if the administration of the factory law be effective, whether or not the outside world knows anything about the work done. The record of the inspector's activity is of no moment to them if the conditions of their employment are properly regulated as provided by law. But the work of a factory inspector is important in a broader sense than that. It sustains a direct relation to the progress of society. Recognizing this fact, laws creating the office of factory inspector provide that such official shall preserve and present annually to some higher authority a record or report of his official acts. These reports are printed and distributed, and through them those who are sufficiently interested can gain some idea of the services rendered.

The factory inspector is the only government agent, who, during the years intervening between federal or state census, has authority to enter our manufacturing places and obtain certain information, which, when properly collated, is of great practical value as a means to determine the development and growth of industry. That the value of his reports is determined by the methods employed to present the facts will be readily admitted. If the scheme of the report is clumsy and unscientific, its value is impaired, for in this age when everything moves so rapidly, neither the student, the social worker, nor the statesman can afford the time to dig information, valuable in itself, which is hidden under a mass of ill-arranged material, and no factory inspector should permit himself to follow a plan of reports that produces discouragement and despair in the mind of the seeker after knowledge.

There is no phase of the factory inspector's work concerning which it is more important that precise information be available than the facts relating to the administration of laws regulating child labor, and it is to the methods employed, or that should be em-

ployed, to record those facts that I shall devote the remainder of my time.

It has been my privilege—somewhat painful in a few cases—to examine the reports of state factory inspectors with a view of securing such information as I thought such reports should contain, as would enable me to gauge the problem from a national standpoint. But, as many of you know, I was doomed to disappointment. Some factory inspectors have contented themselves with a brief textual reference to the subject, and have left us completely in the dark as to the extent of the problem within their jurisdiction. Others have given us apparently complete data, but the arrangement thereof is so ill-adapted to the purposes for which we read the reports as to be almost worthless. For obvious reasons, however, I cannot undertake any sort of a comparative statement of the methods employed by the several departments of inspection in presenting the facts of child labor. I shall present my own ideas of the manner in which a factory inspector should give to the world in condensed and intelligible form the record of the manufacturers of his state in respect to the employment of children.

To begin with, let me say that I speak now as a factory inspector—as an officer whose primary duty is to enforce enactments for the protection of factory workers. I am not a statistician, but when I come to prepare my report I find that I need to use numbers—I want to convey clearly and briefly certain information regarding my work which is of sufficient importance to be preserved; so, perforce of circumstances, I must employ the methods of the man who speaks not in words but in numerals. If I do not adopt this plan, I must leave out much that is of value or string out my report to inordinate lengths. In either case it would be practically valueless. My desire is to present the facts so simply and so clearly that the most ordinary mind can grasp their significance. This can be done in regard to child labor statistics which are gathered, or should be gathered, by the factory inspectors of the country. Every inspector who is neglecting entirely the statistics of factories is falling far short of his opportunities.

The social value of statistics covering the following group of related facts can be quite fully appreciated by those who make a study of industrial conditions and progress:

Number of establishments inspected.

Number of employees at time of inspection.

Number of adult males.

Number of adult females (over sixteen).

Number of male minors (sixteen to eighteen).

Number of boys (fourteen to sixteen).

Number of girls (fourteen to sixteen).

Number of children under fourteen.

It is regrettable that in a few states the factory inspector's report is devoid of any statistical statement. Such reports have scarcely any value whatsoever. The text may be well written, but the absence of statistical grouping of basic facts makes us feel that the fine descriptive text is like a house built without a foundation—we do not know when it may tumble about our ears.

To secure the statistical information above mentioned is a simple problem for the members of our field staff. It is incorporated in the report for each factory and sent to the main office. The work of tabulation can be done thereafter, and may be confined to comparatively simple tables, or, if scientific statisticians are available, more minute and elaborate tables might be worked out. No valid excuse can be given by those inspectors, who, year after year, inflict upon the public the unsatisfactory task of reading a mass of generalities which are unsupported by figures showing the facts supposedly described. I imagine that I hear someone say it is quite easy for the Commissioner of Labor of New York to urge that factory inspectors devote more time to the preparation of statistical tables for their reports, for he has a corps of trained statisticians to perform such service for his bureau of factory inspection, while the factory inspectors in other states are denied the services of even one person experienced in statistical work. It is probably true that no other state department of factory inspection is so fortunate as that of the state of New York. We have an excellent bureau of statistics; yet not all of the statistical tables which appear in the report of our bureau of factory inspection are prepared by the bureau of statistics. I want to state now that, in my opinion, no factory inspector can escape the charge that because his reports do not contain intelligible statistical information, they are deficient in value and interest, by saying that his appropriations would not permit the hiring of persons to prepare such tables. Any person who is intelligent enough to be a factory inspector—who plans and

directs the administration of the laws committed to his department—who possesses a mind keen enough to grasp the facts brought to light through the service, so as to be able to prepare the text of his report—surely can very readily devise simple statistical tables to contain in condensed form the information regularly gathered by this field staff. This being done, any ordinary clerk can carry out the scheme. Such condensed tables would enhance the value of reports of inspection.

When we consider the intense public interest in the subject of child labor, it is astonishing how unresponsive some factory inspectors have been and how meager and uninteresting are the statistics bearing upon the subject as contained in their reports. A public officer whose duty it is to enforce laws for the amelioration of labor should not stifle his humane instincts. As a matter of fact, his close contact with the ills and woes of those who toil should stimulate him to greater activity—to a keener sense of his obligation to see that the full benefit of all laws for their protection should accrue to them. When a factory inspector reaches that stage in his official career as to be indifferent or callous and unresponsive to a reasonable and intelligent and wisely directed public sentiment in regard to matters affecting his official duties, he has outlived his public usefulness.

The National Child Labor Committee realizes the importance of uniform child labor statistics. Therefore, what I have to say upon the subject is not intended as an argument addressed to those participating in this conference. I want to point out, however, a line of duty in respect to this matter which opens out to you, namely, that an earnest effort be made to lead every department of factory inspection to consider very carefully the advisability of agreeing upon some plan of uniform statistics whereby the problem can be broadly and correctly gauged. It seems to me that this Committee could, with entire propriety, formulate a definite plan and have it submitted to the official head of each state department charged with the enforcement of child labor laws, with the request that the plan or system be adopted. It is idle for us to criticise the shortcomings of governmental agents unless we are prepared to go farther and make our criticism constructive. We must suggest methods of improvement; otherwise, our criticism assumes the character of faultfinding.

I hope I may be pardoned for presuming to think that the statistics of child labor, published by the New York Department of Labor, furnish as satisfactory and as comprehensive a statement of the problem as can be found in any official report published in this country. Our tables are quite simple and do not require for their preparation an advanced degree of statistical skill. At the close of our departmental year, within one week after all the inspection reports covering the work done on the last day of the year are received at the office, we can state definitely the full extent of the problem of child labor in each county in the state. This record is arranged for our report in tabular form and shows how many boys and girls fourteen to sixteen were found at work legally, and how many were illegally employed; we also show how many boys and girls under fourteen were at work. By means of this table we centre the attention of our people upon the extent of child labor in our industrial communities, thereby emphasizing the need of vigilance on the part of the friends of the children wherever it appears that the ratio of children to the adult factory workers is abnormally high.

The preparation of this special table is quite simple and the work is done wholly within the bureau of factory inspection. Of course, it will be understood that the data for the table are gathered by the field staff, and are sent to us on special slips provided for that purpose. Upon this slip the deputy factory inspector, if there be occasion for such a course, separates the children employed in each factory into three groups, namely, legally employed, illegally employed, and under fourteen years of age. This slip is really an analysis of the children reported at work in the regular inspection schedule. When received they are filed away by counties until the end of the year, when they are available for use as heretofore mentioned. Statistics of child labor grouped by industries are also of supreme importance, for by no other method can the relative degree of responsibility be properly determined and fixed. The question of restricting the freedom of children to engage in certain occupations is attracting more and more attention, and nobody doubts the need of its serious consideration; but before we undertake restrictive legislation affecting a given industry, we ought to know whether or not children are engaged in it.

Nothing should be taken for granted. A spirit of absolute

fairness should be manifested towards every manufacturing business. It is the duty of every factory inspector to furnish his people with a clear statement of the number of children at work in each industry represented in the manufacturing interests of his state. I will admit that this would involve statistical work of more intricate and technical character, but as to its importance and value there can be but one opinion.

New York publishes statistical tables showing the facts just mentioned. We can tell how many children were at work in a given industry in any stated year. I also conceive this grouping by industries to be important to those who appear before legislative committees in states where efforts are being made to secure the enactment of child labor laws, especially so if the representatives of certain interests argue against the proposed laws on the ground that such enactments would paralyze their industries. If it can be shown that similar industries have been able to survive restrictive legislation in one state, it can be urged that they ought to be able to do so in another. Thus the arguments of the opposition could be successfully met. I do not believe we are very much concerned whether John Smith, who manufactures carpets, employs five, ten or twenty children, except when it is alleged that he employs them illegally. But we are interested in the question as to how many children he and all other manufacturers of carpets in our state are employing, and it is our business to know it and to report it.

Another feature of the report of the factory inspector which vitally affects the problem of child labor is that relating to punitive activity. In New York we have had a fair trial of both methods of law enforcement. Our experience proved that the moral suasion idea as applied to our work was a total failure. There is one way to enforce the law—a fair warning, then a grim demonstration of the fact that the note of warning was just exactly what it purported to be. I am not sure that uniform statistics can be prepared in respect to this phase of our work because of the great variety in the provisions of law relating to child employment on the one hand, and on the other the very striking differences in judicial procedure in the several states. I think, however, that a detailed statement in tabular form, giving the name and address of the defendant, nature of violation, and result of proceedings, should be printed in the factory inspector's report. Those who deliberately

exploit children should be criminally prosecuted, and in addition, their unworthy practices should be exposed in the printed permanent record of the department of inspection. A factory inspector cannot permit himself to be under any sort of obligation to shield violators of the law.

I cannot close my remarks without expressing the hope that in the near future each Commonwealth will have awakened to its full responsibilities with respect to the protection of its children. It is generally conceded that age limit and educational tests, as a bases for determining the right of a child to work in a factory, are unscientific and unreliable. The mere fact that a child has reached a certain age is no proof of its physical fitness to engage in the stern realities of the conflict or struggle for a livelihood. New York has authorized the employment of a medical inspector of factories. We expect to utilize the services of such officer to observe the children who are employed in certain industries, and to gather such data regarding their physical condition and development as will prove helpful in solving the problem. During the year just ended he recorded examinations of a number of children of different nationalities, and the results, while by no means conclusive, point to the great complexity of the whole subject, owing to the cosmopolitan character of our population. I am confident that in due time the introduction of medical science into the intensely practical field of factory inspection will leave an indelible impression.

I predict that as New York demonstrates the value of this new departure, other states will follow her lead. I believe the time will soon come when a conference may be called of the medical inspectors of factories representing every industrial state. Such a conference would wield nation-wide influence in respect to factory sanitation, female labor, and particularly the regulation of child labor. I think our report just published demonstrates clearly that from a sanitary standpoint a wise step was taken when provision was made for a medical inspector. We feel assured that our work on behalf of the children, along the lines indicated herein, will furnish not only a complete justification for the money expended, but will point out the need of extension in order that the whole field be promptly and properly covered.

I have not kept very closely to my subject. I was asked to

outline a scheme of uniform child labor statistics. I have not presumed to do so. I have tried to suggest a few things in regard to an important phase of the question. I have undertaken to point out the duty of the National Child Labor Committee in relation to this matter. If I have succeeded in awakening, even in a small degree, a new sort of interest in the dry side of the child-labor question, then I shall feel that my trip to the city of Chicago was not in vain. And should this Committee see fit to undertake a campaign for uniform statistics. I shall be happy to collaborate in the preparation of a plan to be urged upon the chief factory inspectors. I am personally satisfied that a large majority of our factory inspectors are in full sympathy with the work of this splendid organization.

As a closing word, I assume it to be unnecessary for me, while discussing the importance of uniform systems of statistics of child labor, to emphasize the great need of comparative uniformity in the laws relating to the same subject.